

MARK 1:1-8 ADVENT FEARS? GOD IS GRACIOUS!

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God:

As it is written in the Prophets—[Malachi 3:1] Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You. [Isaiah 40:3] The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD, make His paths straight'

John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist; and he ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

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"Mrs. Meier is coming!"—a statement of fear and of relief. Mrs. Meier was a teacher in our four-classroom Lutheran grade school. She often subbed. One particular year she was a long term sub. She was a no-nonsense type of lady. If you were out of line, you did not want to deal with Mrs. Meier—"Mrs. Meier is coming!"—bad news. However, one day after school when our teacher was out of the room, a classmate's friend from another school came in to visit. Soon he was going through student desks and snooping around. I didn't like that idea. I went to get another teacher. I found Mrs. Meier. On the way back to the classroom, I was thinking with a sense of relief, "Mrs. Meier is coming!" She verbally reprimanded the fellow and sent him packing. ---- In Advent "Jesus is coming." That, too, carries two very different emotions.

This text is the very beginning of the book of Mark. Mark was not one of the Twelve Disciples (too young, it seems). He was closely associated with Jesus and the Twelve. Mark starts his account of Jesus' life, *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God*. The word "gospel"—likely you remember—means "good news." Mark says that his document is good news, comforting news, a happy message, for his readers—the good news of *Jesus Christ, the Son of God*.

The name "Jesus" is the same as the Old Testament name "Joshua." Remember the Joshua who led Israel into the Promised Land where they won many miraculous victories. The name "Joshua" or "Jesus" means "one who saves." The Spanish name "Hay-soos" is the same; it is actually spelled "j-e-s-u-s." This name Jesus was very appropriate for Jesus of Nazareth. As the angel told Joseph in a dream, when Joseph was unsure about what to do regarding his fiancée Mary, who was expecting a baby that was not his, "Fear not to take Mary your wife. She is with child by God the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son. You shall name him 'Jesus,' for He will 'SAVE' His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:19-21). Although at first Joseph was afraid about the arrival/ advent of this baby, the angel's message relieved and comforted him! --- The same is true for us at Advent and Christmas. The Son of God is coming--oh, No! Actually, Oh, Yes!

Mark identifies Jesus as "Christ"—as in "Christ"mas, the festive church day on which we celebrate Jesus' entrance into life on this earth. "Christ" is not so much a name, but a title. It means the "appointed One." A person who was appointed for a special job in the Old Testament was "anointed" (was "Messiah"-ed) with a special fragrant blend of olive oil and spices. The birth of Jesus on earth was not just an accident, nor was it just circumstances that would open the door for Him to become our Savior. The birth of Jesus was God's plan from before creation. (God did not make man sin, but knew man would sin.) God's plan was to appoint a Savior to rescue man from punishment for sins. This Jesus was "appointed" or "anointed" to be the Savior.

Mark also says, Jesus Christ is *the Son of God*. It is humanly impossible for us to save ourselves from the acts of rebellion and disobedience which we commit against God. The Son of God Himself is coming! Bad news, frightening news, for sinners. But comfort and relief for sinners who clasp Him by faith, trusting that He is the Savior from sin and its condemnation!

This Good News / Gospel was promised / proclaimed in the Old Testament. Mark quotes two Old Testaments prophets, Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3, concerning this appointed and anointed One to come. and also concerning His forerunner John the Baptist. *Behold, I [God] send My messenger before Your [Jesus] face, who will prepare Your way before You.* ” ----- *“The voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way of the LORD; make His paths straight’ ”* In other words, when the appointed Savior and Rescuer comes, prepare your heart for Him. Put away the devious and crooked ways of your heart and get straight with Him—lest His arrival be a frightening advent and not a joyous one.

By the Holy Spirit’s inspiration, Mark tells us nothing about Mary, Joseph, the birth of Jesus, the manger, the shepherds, the angels. Mark includes none of that. Mark goes straight ahead thirty years to the heart of the matter, to the forerunner John the Baptist preparing people’s hearts to meet the adult Jesus, proclaiming, “Repent and be baptized; the Kingdom of God is at hand!” In other words, “Recognize your sins and the punishment you deserve. But be cleansed by God’s merciful washing in baptism and meet the Promised One with joy, not fear (Matthew 3:1-6). John was not concerned about style-points, flair, or self. The message was the thing. *Now John was clothed with camel’s hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, “There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”* He says, I perform outward baptism, but He is the one who gives Baptism its spiritual power to cleanse your soul.

Hear John’s message! Do not be self-confident, self-righteous, proud, and *foolish* regarding what God’s Word says about sin and sinners. You know you are a sinner, right?--not pleasing to God—not the 100% He expects. Stop doing things your way instead of His way; stop satisfying your flesh and sin-warped logic, rather than following the Lord in childlike faith. Without cleansing in Christ, there will be a rude awakening at the second advent of Jesus, the Son of God. It won’t just be Mrs. Meier that you face, but Jesus with all His holy angels, who will burn the chaff in fire and gather the wheat into His barn. John said, “The Son of God is coming, to whom you must answer. And even I, John, am nothing before Him. The One coming after me is mightier than I. He’s so much greater than I that I am not acceptable to loosen His sandal strap.” -- That’s pretty low. For you and me also. To stoop to untie His shoe string, or to stoop to take off His boots for Him, only to hear that you are not really worthy even to do that, puts us in a very bad spot. But here, God’s messenger, John the Baptist, brought comforting, news and relief. Baptism! Jesus, washes you clean in Baptism and grants you the gift of the Holy Spirit. Through the water and the Word of God, placed before your heart, the Holy Spirit leads you to clasp Jesus by faith and share in the relief and the joy of knowing that your unworthiness, transgressions, and trespasses are forgiven! You meet Him at His Advent with joy!

The meaning of the name John is worthy of note. “John” in English comes from German “Johannes (Yohannes),” “Johann (Yohann)” —“Hans” for short, which comes from Greek, which comes from Old Testament Hebrew, “Jehovah(Yehovah)-Ckanan” or “Jo-ckanan” meaning “Jehovah is Gracious / God is Gracious.” God’s grace—He reaches out to you without payment on your part, without earning for yourself some or all of His kindness, and is generous to you. God’s Grace is God’s undeserved love and pardon, in Jesus, Christ, His Son. The pardon is yours. Trust Him! God is gracious was “John’s” message!

Such is your approach to Advent and Christmas this year! “Lord, lead me to see my predicament of sin, and to trust You for rescue and salvation—for forgiveness of sins, for resurrection from the grave, for life forever in heaven. Lord, You are gracious in Jesus.” --- What a comfort! --- That is also your approach to His great Advent on your last day, or the Last Day. “I am about to meet and be refreshed in Jesus my Savior!” No fear.

Amen! So be it!

---Pastor Kanzenbach